

NEWARK
PUBLIC
INFORMATION
OFFICE



City Hall, 920 Broad Street, Room 214
Newark, New Jersey 07102
(201) 733-8004
Pamela E. Goldstein, Director

MONDAY, APRIL 22, 1996
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
PLEASE CONTACT: PAM GOLDSTEIN (201) 733-6368

JAMES CALLS FOR REPEAL OF POLICE CONTROLLED CHASE POLICY

Mayor Sharpe James announced today that he would end the Police Department's strict policy in chasing stolen cars to bring it more into line with the state Attorney General's guidelines that allow for police officer discretion to engage in a pursuit.

In 1992, the Newark Police Department adopted a "controlled chase" policy which prohibits pursuit of a stolen vehicle where there is no confirmed knowledge that the vehicle was used in the commission of a crime, or the occupant/s is/are wanted for the perpetration of a crime.

James contends Newark has one of the strictest procedures in the state in going after car thieves and made several hundred arrests last year. "However, these perpetrators should not be given assurance that they will not be punished, because with this knowledge they may continue to speed, and use their stolen vehicles as weapons that injure, maim and kill people.

"The kids who steal these cars know that" the Mayor said, "In most instances, they will get away with it. The criminal justice system does not prosecute auto theft with the same zeal as murderers, rapists and robbers,

"The jails are full, and young car thieves are treated as juvenile delinquents, not criminals, which encourages them to be defiant and drive recklessly, endangering both their lives and the lives of innocent victims. And, in some unfortunate instances, these stolen vehicles become weapons of death." James stated.

-more-

CARJACK AD 1

State guidelines, in some respect "only confuse a police officer," who is attempting to use good judgment in conducting a chase, according to the official. "On the one hand, the officer is confronted with a long list of crimes and the degrees for each which must be considered in the decision to chase. Yet, on the other hand, guidelines a few pages later indicate that he can pursue for a motor vehicle violation that is not even a crime."

James also pressed for swift legislative action to impose more severe penalties for auto theft, which would include making parents or guardians liable for the injuries and damage done by their children.

"This is the only way to improve the quality of life in our urban communities," he asserted.

The Mayor contended that those who hijack and steal automobiles should be given mandatory prison sentences just like persons caught carrying a gun in the commission of a crime under the Graves Bill, named for the late State Senator and Paterson Mayor Frank X. Graves, author of the bill.

"Stealing a car, which can cost from \$10,000 to \$100,000, and driving it 60, 70 or 95 miles through city streets makes it a deadly weapon that can kill and injure or cause property damage to many," he contended. "Why should the victim of the theft have to pay for the towing, storage and cost of repairs on his vehicle, as well as the cost of renting a car until his auto is repaired or replaced?"

James suggested that the perpetrators and/or parents and guardians pay any costs--medical, property damage, loss of salary--incurred by the individual committing the crime. And, if they cannot pay the costs, he maintained that they should be required to perform community service work as part of their sentencing.

In addition, he called for revocation of the perpetrator's and/or parent or guardian's driving privileges or placement of minors in boot camps.

"When Megan Kanka was brutally and tragically murdered, the New Jersey State Legislature passed Megan's Law to protect communities against dangerous sex offenders. The death last week of Jessica Dubroff in an airplane crash has prompted the Federal Aviation Administration and Congress to consider laws to prohibit anyone under 16 from flying a plane, even with an instructor. Surely, enough heinous crimes have been caused by stolen cars that it is time to enact stiff and mandatory penalties," James stressed.